

HELPFUL HINT FOR HOT SUMMER DAYS
Striking Back Against Heat Stroke
NANTUCKET, MA. AUGUST 1, 2007

“This is the time of year when seniors need to take precautions against heat stroke,” **Heat** stroke (or sun stroke) is a life-threatening condition that causes a rise in temperature, possibly resulting in brain damage and death. It’s what happens when the victim is no longer sweating to cool off. Seniors and children are both at high risk of heat-related disorders.

Lives can be saved by responding quickly and treating heat disorders as potentially life-threatening. Dehydration and heat-related illnesses (heat cramps and heat exhaustion) are all precursors of deadly heat stroke.

“Professional caregivers are sensitive to the special needs of seniors in the summer heat. For example, we plan activities in air conditioning whenever possible, avoiding the mid-day sun and heat, at Our Island Home”. In Massachusetts, the average high temperature in July and August is in the 80’s (81° in Boston, 85° in Springfield), (as we know, it is somewhat cooler on Nantucket), with record highs of 104°. Here are some tips to avoid a heat emergency when the temperature rises:

- Drink water regularly, even if you do not feel thirsty. Water is what your body uses to keep cool. When it is hot, avoid drinks with alcohol or caffeine, which exaggerate heat’s effect on the body.
- Stay indoors, if possible. Air conditioned rooms are best, but if not available, stay on the lowest floor, in the shade. Consider visiting a public, air-conditioned location (such as a library, shopping mall, senior center or heat-relief shelter) for several hours each day.
- When it’s hot outside, limit physical activity, and rest often. Activity and exercise raise body temperature, bringing these problems on quicker than otherwise.
- Don’t use salt tablets unless under a doctor’s orders.

Heat exhaustion signs include heavy sweating, paleness, tiredness/weakness/exhaustion, dizziness/headache, irritability, nausea/vomiting, increased breathing rate. Skin is cool, moist or flushed. Body temperature will be close to normal.

Treat heat exhaustion by seeking an air conditioned environment, drinking cool, non-alcoholic beverages such as water or electrolyte-based sports drinks, taking a cool sponge bath/traditional bath/shower, and changing to lightweight clothing. If condition worsens or lasts more than one hour, seek medical treatment. Left untreated, heat exhaustion becomes heat stroke.

Heat stroke signs include red, hot skin, rapid pulse, body temperature of 103° or higher, throbbing headache/dizziness, seizure, nausea/vomiting, confusion/agitation or unconsciousness.

Treat heat stroke by calling 911 right away! Until EMS arrives, move the person in the shade and use water to cool him/her (sponging, spraying with water from hose, placing in tub/pool, etc.), give non-alcoholic fluids if the person is able to drink.

The good news is this: heat stroke doesn’t strike without warning, and it can be avoided with knowledge and some simple preventative steps. Some experts speculate that seniors sometimes miss the early warning signs of heat stroke because they continue to feel cool, even when heat rises. Relatives, friends and caregivers must be especially vigilant to protect seniors when temperatures rise.